

# Rio's Coffee Trade Has A Noble Tradition

### Trade's Interest Limited to Actual Purchase and Sale, Not Speculation

By Marcelino Martins Filho

President, Centro do Comercio de Cafe de Rio de Janeiro  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**C**OFFEE growing in Brazil acquired international importance only from the time it spread throughout the Paraiba River valley, a vast sub-tropical "belt", tributary to a large extent to the port of Rio de Janeiro. The precious rubiceous plant was brought from French Guiana in 1727, by Major Francisco de Melo Palheta and introduced in the North of the country. There, it remained as an article of more or less importance, by the side of cocoa, sugar, indigo and other products which were at the time cultivated.

#### Earliest Economic Influence

Coffee started to exert its influence in the economic life of Brazil only after it was brought to the

capital of the old Portuguese colony in 1750, by the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Rio, Joao Alberto Castelo Branco. In the beginning, it was a garden plant. Soon, however, it entered the so called "Baixada Fluminense" (Rio Low Lands), a vast zone surrounding the city of Rio de Janeiro, between the ocean and the Serra do Mar, where the Brazilian plateau begins. And in this way it reached the Paraiba River valley, which crosses the "Baixada" in the last few miles of its course, before ending near the sea.

This phenomenon coincided with the proclamation of Independence and the formation of the Brazilian Empire. Its importance arose from the fact that coffee growing in that river valley supplied the old regime with the export article which was to become, for a century and a half, until the present day, the basis of our export trade.

It is known that economic activity is the foundation upon which the cultural and political life of a community are based. Thus the importance that the Paraiba valley had in the economic life of the Empire. It was even written that "the Empire was the valley". As a matter of fact, it was along the Paraiba river that the first Brazilian cities, different from those of colonial aspect and the older towns scattered throughout the national territory, were born and flourished. Coffee created a new civilization in the valley, with its plantations, its slaves, its spacious residences, its luxurious ornamentations imported from Europe and its patriarchal character. The most successful and cultured coffee growers were raised by the Crown to the Nobility, there originating the "Coffee barons" which were to dominate the political life of the country until 1888, when slavery was abolished, and until 1889, when the Republic was proclaimed.

#### Economic Importance of Rio

We have sketched the above picture, to emphasize the importance of the Paraiba valley in coffee growing in Brazil, for the purpose of establishing its relation to the port of Rio de Janeiro, and to show, in that manner, the decisive position that the commerce of that city exerted for many years and still continues to exert on the export of Brazilian coffee. And that is because more than half the valley that is, all its lower portion, is tributary to the port of Rio de Janeiro.



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